

A
LETTER
TO A
PARTICULAR FRIEND
EDUCATED
IN THE
ROMISH CHURCH,
AND CONSCIENTIOUSLY ATTACHED TO
THAT COMMUNION.

BY RICHARD HILL, ESQ.

“SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.” *K*

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A
L E T T E R, &c.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I SHALL not preface this letter with any apologies for my long silence. Suffice it to say that if some unavoidable impediments had not prevented my writing, the important subject of your last certainly demanded a more speedy acknowledgment. However, I now return you my sincere thanks for it, and beg to offer without any reserve, such considerations as occurred to me from the perusal of it.

It is a truth confessed and allowed both by Protestants and Roman Catholics, that

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Christ

Christ always was, always is, and always will be with his Church ; and that this Church shall so far be guided into all truth, as never to be suffered to err in such a manner as to affect the eternal salvation of any of it's members.—The whole dispute then between us is, What is the true Church of Christ ? And where is this Church to be found ? Those of the Roman communion confine it wholly to themselves, as descending regularly from the time of the Apostles down to the present age ; and suppose infallibility to be inseparable from the papal chair.

The Protestants affirm that by the Church is meant the body of all faithful people, from the beginning of the world, to the end of it ; all who are united to Jesus Christ the Head by living faith ; all who are created anew, and regenerated by the Spirit of God, though, differing from each other in some lesser outward matters. They moreover believe that infallibility no more belongs to the Bishop of Rome, than to any other Bishop ; but that the only infallible guide is the Spirit of God, which
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ever teaches agreeably to that word of which he himself is the author; that therefore it must be highly displeasing to him who has graciously vouchsafed this divine instructor to his Church, to see any persons rely on man's authority; and instead of resting on the word of promise that "all God's children shall be taught of him^a," fly to human traditions, and swallow down for truth, whatever may be told them by those whose inclination or interest may have prompted them to take upon themselves the office of pastors, however contrary their lives may be to the precepts of that word whereof they profess themselves ministers; and even notwithstanding this very word assures us that "they only who do his will, shall know the doctrine whether it be of God^b."

In answer to what you urge in defence of Freewill * and Merit, I shall only say

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that

^a Isa. liv. 13.

^b John vii. 17.

* Though we deny man's *freewill*, yet we deny not that every man *acts freely*, both in a state of nature, and in a state of grace. In the former, he can only

that all sound Protestants abhor these doctrines, as tending directly to establish the detestable and dangerous heresy of Pelagianism; making no difference between man in his fallen state, and Adam in his original state of innocence; and particularly, as being subversive of the Apostle's declaration that God "of *his own will* begat his children by the word of truth^c;" and that they who are such, "are not born of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God^d."—That "when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants;" so that all "boasting must be excluded," and "he that glorieth must glory only in the Lord^e." The way therefore in which true Protestants settle their belief, is not by making the

only follow that corrupt bias which all the faculties of his soul have contracted by the Fall. In the latter, his understanding being enlightened to know the things which belong to his peace, he *freely* chooses the good, and refuses the evil. So that as an eminent Prelate observes, "though God uses an infinite power in the conversion of a soul, yet he uses no compulsion."

^c James i. 18. ^d John i. 13. ^e Jer. ix. 24.—

1 Cor. i. 31. 2 Cor. x. 17.

scripture

scripture submit to the traditions and decisions of men, but by comparing all human traditions and decisions with the sacred oracles of truth, and receiving or rejecting them according as they agree or differ from this standard. For instance, if the scripture tells us that "in the latter days seducing spirits should arise forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth;" if in any age of the Church we find any such prohibitions of meats, and such injunctions of celibacy, we reject them according to the Apostle's own words, as "the doctrines of devils," and as the delusions of those whose character it is "to speak lies in hypocrisy, having their consciences seared with an hot iron^f." Nevertheless, whilst the Romanists absolutely forbid their clergy to marry, they profess to believe in that word which speaks of the wife of St. Peter, whom notwithstanding they call their first Pope.

^f 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2, 3, &c.

With regard to what you have offered in favor of TRANSUBSTANTIATION, I must beg leave to observe that all Protestants reject this doctrine not only as a novelty unheard of in the six first centuries of the Church, but as subversive of the whole design of Christ's suffering, which was "*once, by one offering* (not by being many times offered) to obtain eternal Redemption for us, and to perfect for ever them that are sanctified^s. But, to say nothing of the manifest absurdity of Christ in his human nature being present in many thousand places at once, nor of the horrid idea of eating the God of heaven and earth, if there be, as the Roman Catholics suppose, a miraculous change of the bread and wine, it is the only miracle Christ ever wrought which contradicted the senses of the beholders, and certainly the design of every miracle is to force conviction on the senses, but never to contradict them. As when our Lord at the marriage of Cana turned the water into wine, the change was evident by the taste, to the Governor of the feast, and to all the guests.

^s Heb. x. 14.

It may be urged that what Christ has literally asserted, ought, however mysterious, to be literally believed. True, where it does not set the scripture at variance with itself; where it does not destroy the very nature of a sacrament, by turning it into a sacrifice; and overthrow the whole design of our Lord's *one offering for sin*, as the doctrine of transubstantiation evidently does. Besides, this way of arguing would soon prove too much; and we have the same authority to believe Christ to be literally a *way*^h, a *door*ⁱ, or a *vine tree*^k, as to suppose a piece of bread, or a consecrated wafer, to be literally his body. Nor can I think it would be a whit less absurd and unscriptural to affirm, that because Christ hath promised to *come in and sup* with those who open to him when he knocks^l, that therefore he literally and bodily comes down from heaven, and sits at table with us; and that he himself having made this positive declaration, we ought not to reason about the manner in which it is done, any more than we ought

^h John xiv. 6. ⁱ John x. 9. ^k John xv. 1, 2, &c.

^l Rev. iii. 20.

to call in question the doctrines of the Incarnation, and of a Trinity in unity, because these truths are so far above what our finite capacities can comprehend. But this is by no means a fair way of arguing, nor is the case at all similar; for though the doctrines of a Trinity and of the Incarnation are *above* our reason, yet they are not *contrary* to it, nor do they offer violence to any of our senses, as the doctrine of transubstantiation does.

We must therefore explain scripture by scripture, and by this unerring rule we shall clearly see that Christ is present at his table, just in the same manner as he is present with his Church, viz. not grossly and corporally, but divinely and spiritually; and that when it is said "except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you^m," this must be understood of a spiritual feeding of the soul by faith upon Christ; or as it is styled by the apostle Peter a "*tasting* that the Lord is graciousⁿ:" and indeed the

^m John vi. 53.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 3.

passage itself will not without manifest distortion admit of any other interpretation; because the eating and drinking here mentioned stands in connection with the life spoken of in the latter part of the verse, which life is without dispute the spiritual life of the soul, and not bodily or animal life. Either, therefore it must be granted that the life mentioned in the latter clause is the life of the body, or else that the eating and drinking in the former clause, must be a spiritual eating and drinking.

Again where our Lord says "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him °," it is most certain that a material eating and drinking cannot be intended; because thousands of wicked persons and such as are destitute of a lively faith, may, as saith St. Augustine, *carnally press with their teeth, the sacrament of the Lord's supper*, yet it can in no wise be said of them, that they dwell in Christ, and Christ in them; since this is only true of real believers.

° John vi. 56.

It should further be particularly noticed that our blessed Lord in this 6th chap. of St. John, speaks of the Manna which was given to the Church under the old testament dispensation, as typical of himself, the true manna and living bread which came down from heaven.—This manna Israel after the flesh literally eat in the wilderness, for their bodily sustenance; thereby prefiguring that feast of fat things which was reserved for God's spiritual Israel under the gospel, who now feed upon Christ by living faith; and by virtue of their mystical union with him, through his Spirit dwelling in their hearts, their souls are nourished up unto everlasting life, and they become one with Christ, and Christ one with them.—But the Church of Rome by interpreting the texts quoted out of this chapter of a gross, carnal eating and drinking of Christ's real body and blood, destroy the very end and idea of that more noble, divine, and spiritual feast which believers feed upon under this better covenant; and to which they are more especially invited at the table of their Lord and Saviour, when, through the elements of bread and wine, they view him

him as much really present to the eye of faith, for the strengthening and refreshing of their souls, during their pilgrimage through this wilderness world of sin and sorrow, to the heavenly Canaan; as the Israelites of old, viewed the manna in the wilderness through which they journeyed, by the eye of sense, and by which their bodies were nourished till they arrived at the promised land.—Yet even *in* this wilderness those that were spiritual among the Jews, rested not in carnal ordinances and institutions, but looked through all the types and shadows under the Law, to what the Apostle calls the more glorious times of Reformation under the gospel ^P.

But the doctrine of transubstantiation exactly harmonizes with the gross conceptions of the carnal Jews when they asked “how can this man give us his flesh to eat?” and therefore the same answer should be given to the Romanists as our Lord gave to them, “the words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life *.”

Though

^P Heb. ix. 10.

* The same veil was upon the heart of that great master in Israel Nicodemus (though not upon the same

Though in order to defend a corporal presence in the sacrament, the Church of Rome pleads for an adherence to the very letter of the scripture; yet in some other of her tenets, she does not scruple to depart from the positive words of holy writ. To instance only in her denial of the cup to the laity; and this though our Lord has expressly said “drink ye *all* of this⁹” and left any in future times, should confine this *all*, to *all* his apostles, or *all* his ministers, we find St. Paul, in his epistle to the whole church of Corinth, repeatedly enjoining a worthy *drinking* of the cup, as well as a worthy eating of the bread; and it is remarkable that in five or six different places,

same occasion,) when he stumbled at the doctrine of the new birth, and asked “how can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” As also for a season upon the heart of the woman of Samaria, when she confounded the waters of life, with those of Jacob’s well: And in some measure upon the Apostles themselves before the day of Pentecost, when they asked “Has any man given him ought to eat?” upon Christ’s saying to them that he had meat to eat which the world knew not of.

⁹ Mat. xxvi. 27.

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in the same, and in the foregoing chapter, he never mentions receiving the bread, without *drinking* the cup; and instead of calling one the real body, and the other the real blood of Christ, he calls them “the communion of the blood of Christ, and the communion of the body of Christ:” In conformity to his great Master who has commanded us to receive *both*, not as his actual body and blood, but IN REMEMBRANCE of him. I know that the reason given by the Church of Rome for depriving their members of one part of the Lord’s supper, is that whosoever receives the body of Christ, must also receive his blood, since the blood cannot be separated from the body: but this way of reasoning renders the command of our Lord and St. Paul to receive both kinds quite needless: and is indeed to profess ourselves wiser than what is written. Besides this argument again proves too much; for by the same rule the Priests themselves ought to receive the sacrament only in one kind.

¹ 1 Cor. x. 16.—xi. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, &c.

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Let me now ask, what authority there is for the Priest's receiving alone, whilst the people are kneeling all about him? The answer I suppose usually given, is, because the Priest offers up the sacrifice of the mass for the sins of the people. Bring only one text of scripture in confirmation of this, and I will allow the truth and the necessity of it. But this cannot be done; though numberless texts may be produced to prove that it is striking at the very root of that most fundamental doctrine of christianity, the satisfaction made for sin by the death of Christ; and that it in a manner brings believers back again to the ceremonial law, under which daily sacrifices were offered up; but these were to cease, when he who was the end of them all was to appear, and by the offering of his own body *once* for all, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. But they who look upon the mass as a daily sacrifice for sin, are quite of a contrary mind to St. Paul, who tells us, "that Christ needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did *once*, when he offered up himself." "Nor yet that

that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place, every year with blood of others : for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world ; but now *once* in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment ; so Christ was *once* offered to bear the sins of many ;” and “ where remission of these is, there is *no more offering for sin*.”

I might now enlarge on the strange unscriptural custom of praying in an unknown tongue, and of offering supplications to departed saints, and to the Virgin Mary, to the great dishonour of the one Mediator between God and man. I might also say much on the idolatrous practice of bowing down before pictures and graven images, the work of men’s hands, in open violation of the second commandment, which says, “ thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing in heaven or in earth ; thou shalt not bow
down.

* Heb. vii. 27.—ix. 25, 26, &c.—x. 10, 11, 12.

down to them †," &c. I might further speak of the arrogant practice of granting pardons and indulgences, and might particularly expatiate on the doctrine of *purgatory*, which though it has not one text of scripture for it's own support, has brought plenty of gains for the support of the church's power; and this by undervaluing and almost making of none effect the sufferings of the Redeemer, which it does by supposing that any other sufferings besides his are necessary towards expiating and putting away the sins of those that shall be saved. — The vain glorious notion also of justification by men's own righteousness, and especially of *works of supererogation* in defiance of the plain declaration of God's word, which tells us, that "when we have done all those things which are commanded us, we are unprofitable servants",^t might

† As a proof of what bold liberties the Roman catholics will take with the Scriptures when they contradict their own tenets, they make no scruple of striking the second commandment out of the Decalogue. I myself have seen it omitted in their printed prayer books.

^t Luke xvii. 10.

might furnish me with matter for a volume. But neither my own time, nor the compass of a letter will allow me to dwell on any of these points; I shall therefore conclude what I have to say with my most earnest wishes and prayers, that the God of all grace would enable you to lay these things to heart with that seriousness which their great importance demands at your hands: and for this end, I beseech you diligently to examine your heart, as in the presence of him to whom the secrets of it are all open, whether you are divested of all prejudice in favor of the Roman catholic, and against the protestant religion: and when you have done this, fear not to take into your hands those divine oracles which God has graciously vouchsafed for your instruction, under the guidance of his blessed spirit, though by the craft of designing men this inestimable gift is wrested out of the people's hands, in downright opposition to the divine command of him who has positively enjoined us to "search the scriptures", and who so much commendeth the *Bereans* for having done so.

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To the reading of God's word add earnest prayer for the divine illumination in your searches after truth: and in the use of these means, I doubt not but you will soon be brought to see that the charge of novelty belongs not to the church of England, or any other reformed church, but to the church of Rome; and that the stale question so often put to the protestants, "where was your religion before Luther's and Calvin's time?" may very properly be answered, by saying "it was where it is now, viz. in the Bible, where the creed of *his Holiness* could never yet be found." Yet because the innovations of popery have crept in by degrees, and in the darkest ages of superstition, therefore the Romish church lays claim to antiquity, and brands the protestant religion with the charge of novelty. But this is not less unreasonable than if I were to see an ancient shield covered with rust, and from thence were to conclude that the rust was still more ancient than the shield itself: the rust indeed might carry the vestiges of antiquity, but still it was not originally upon the shield; remove
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the rust, and the pristine beauty of the shield will appear to view.

I beg to add one word more by way of conclusion. — Should you by reading this letter or any other means be led to see that you have hitherto been in an error, and thereupon to renounce your former principles; beware of a change of opinion, without a change of heart; since nothing short of vital union with Christ, through the faith of his own operation, evidencing itself in a life of deadness to the world, and of devotedness to God, will stand you in any stead.

Indeed, my dear friend, I dare not call your sincerity in question. I believe you heartily wish to be found in the right way; and that you are striving to serve God in what you judge to be that way: and as you have been pleased to bear the same testimony of me, let me earnestly intreat you to attribute any expressions which may perhaps appear to you either too warm, or bearing too hard upon that church in which you have been educated, as the effect of at least

least a well-meant zeal for what I cannot doubt to be the truth of God, and of my unfeigned love and regard for one whom I always did, and ever shall esteem as a most valuable friend.

With this assurance, which yet does but faintly express the feelings of my heart, permit me to subscribe myself,

My Dear Friend,

Most truly and faithfully yours,

RICHARD HILL.

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